

Understanding pattern and trends in use of tobacco in India

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Tobacco smoking has been in vogue for hundreds of years. With the spread of tobacco to Europe and other parts of the world from the sixteenth century, tobacco smoking soon gained popularity in India. Tobacco consumption is responsible for half of all the cancers in men and a quarter of all cancers in women in India.¹ This is in addition to being a risk factor for cardiovascular diseases and chronic obstructive pulmonary diseases.^{2, 3} India also has one of the highest rates of oral cancer in the world, partly attributed to high prevalence of tobacco chewing.⁴⁻⁷ The World Health Organization predicts that tobacco deaths in India may exceed 1.5 million annually by 2020.⁸ It has been observed that a significant rural-urban-slum-urban gradient for tobacco use among men as well as women exists in India. There are different, and opposing, trends for use of smoked tobacco (more in rural areas) and smokeless tobacco (more in urban area) among men. However it has been observed that among women, the consumption of smokeless tobacco does not vary significantly.

Understanding use of tobacco in India requires a special understanding of the diversity that India offers in culture and geography. Tobacco for certain is not used in a single form throughout India. Here we discuss some of the major forms of tobacco use and its geographical distribution in India. The most popular smoking form of tobacco in India is Beedis. Thirty-four per cent of the tobacco produced in India is used for making beedis. Beedis are made by rolling a dried, rectangular piece of tendu leaf with 0.15 to 0.25 g of sundried, flaked tobacco.⁹ Cigarette smoking is the second most popular smoking form of tobacco used in India after beedis. Cigarette use in India, with a few exceptions, seems to be confined to the use of manufactured cigarettes only. Chuttas are coarsely prepared cheroots. They are usually the products of cottage and small-scale industries, or are made at home. Nearly 9% of the tobacco produced in India is used for making chuttas. It is

estimated that about 3000 million pieces of chutta are made annually in India. Chutta smoking is widespread in the coastal areas of Andhra Pradesh, Tamil Nadu and Orissa.¹⁰ Chutta is also used in reverse smoking. The term is used to describe smoking while keeping the glowing end of the tobacco product inside the mouth.

Reverse chutta smoking is practised extensively by women in the rural areas of Visakhapatnam and the Srikakulam district of Andhra Pradesh.¹⁰ Unlike beedis and chuttas, dhumtis are not available from vendors but are prepared by the smokers themselves. Dhumti is a kind of a conical cigar made by rolling tobacco leaf in the leaf of another plant. In a study conducted in Goa, a coastal area in India on a random sample of about 5400 villagers, 4% were dhumti smokers.¹ In India Chillum smoking is an exclusively male practice, limited to the northern states of India, predominantly in rural areas. The chillum is a

straight, conical pipe made of clay, 10 to 14 cm long, held vertically. In a study from rural Uttar Pradesh of 35,000 individuals, 28% of the villagers were found to be chillum smokers.¹² The key behind the huge popularity of chillum is that most are made locally, are inexpensive and easily available. Moreover, a single Chillum is shared by many. Hookah is an Indian water pipe in which the tobacco smoke passes through water before inhalation. Hookah use has seen a decline in recent times because it is inconvenient to carry a hookah from one place to other. In addition to smoking tobacco products, non-smoking tobacco products are also available in India. Smokeless tobacco or tobacco that is consumed without heating or burning is used orally or nasally in most parts of India. The nasal use of tobacco is not as frequent as is the oral use of tobacco. The different methods of consumption of oral tobacco include chewing, sucking and applying tobacco preparations to the teeth and gums. Most of the smokeless tobacco products are often made at home. However, a trend to prepare a variety of smokeless tobacco products industrially on a large scale and distribute commercially has been observed recently. The products are available in small plastic and aluminium foil packets. Some of the common forms of Smokeless tobacco used in India are Paan (betel quid) with tobacco, Paan masala, Mawa, khaini (Tobacco and slaked lime) The India tobacco story is incomplete without discussing tobacco chewing. Small pieces of raw or commercially available finely cut tobacco is used for this purpose. The brighter side to tobacco chewing is that tobacco chewing alone, however, does not appear to be very common in India. In a study among 10,000 dental outpatients in Lucknow (Uttar Pradesh) and 57,000 industrial workers in Ahmedabad (Gujarat) 2.1% and 2.6% chewed tobacco alone respectively.^{13,14} Several smokeless tobacco preparations such as mishri,

are intended primarily for cleaning the teeth. The use arise from a widespread misconception that tobacco is good for the teeth. Mishri essentially is a roasted, powdered preparation made by baking tobacco on a hot metal plate until it is uniformly black.

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